



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE COLLECTION OF DATA IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING<sup>1</sup>

By JOHN VAN HORNE

The following article is a presentation to readers of the *Modern Language Journal* of a project to establish machinery for the annual collection of facts regarding Modern Language teaching. The material is offered in tentative form in the hope that it may elicit discussion and suggestions. If the idea of establishing means for the assembling of data is approved by readers of this journal, it is hoped that they will generously contribute advice. Counsel is solicited first with regard to the advisability of putting the scheme into operation. If the general attitude is favorable, criticism is invited concerning the questionnaire at the end of the paper, in order that useless or faulty questions may be omitted or amended, valuable ones added, and in order that the questions may be adapted to both high school and college classes. Advice would also be welcome on various important practical matters, such as the number of persons who should carry out the scheme, the best means of securing the proper persons, financial support of the plan, and the means of publishing the results. When the project has been improved by suggestions, it is hoped that a definite formal recommendation may be made to the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers. Please send suggestions to the writer.

At present there appears to be no machinery in existence for the collection, digestion and publication, on a large scale, of contemporary data as to modern language teaching in the United States. There is no clearing house to which material from institutions in all parts of the country may be submitted for purposes of classification and comparison. In short, we have no organization whereby we may become acquainted systematically with the facts of linguistic instruction in the schools, colleges and univer-

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a paper read at the meeting of the Association of Modern Language Teachers of the Central West and South in Chicago, May, 1919.

sities of the United States. The size of the country and the vast number of institutions in which modern languages are taught make it obviously impossible to keep abreast of all teaching details. A reasonably satisfactory knowledge of what is actually being done from year to year in high schools and colleges is the most that can be expected.

Knowledge of pedagogical methods used by others cannot fail to be of value to every teacher. If a process can be put into operation to make easily accessible the important facts of contemporary linguistic education, the results ought to compensate for the effort. The whole problem resolves itself into the collection of data about what is happening. The ideal system would be to reach every institution in the United States (and perhaps Canada) in which modern languages are taught. Of course such an ideal cannot well be realized; but we should reach so many high schools and colleges that the resulting data gathered would be sufficient in quantity to insure tangible results.

Machinery for the collection of data might be controlled by a single person, or by a single committee; by an individual for each language for which data are desired, or by a committee for each language. Separate individuals or separate committees might undertake the collection of high school data as distinguished from college or university data. However the machinery might be controlled, the methods and purpose of investigation would be the same.

Assuming that the primary purpose of elementary modern language instruction is the development of ability to speak, understand, read and write the language studied, we should collect data along these four lines. More difficult, but not impossible, would be the assembling of facts regarding the cultural benefits conferred by language study. In each of these branches of linguistic education—speaking, understanding, reading, writing, and cultural value—there are many details about which information might be asked. Taking the matter of imparting the ability to speak a foreign language, we should like to secure a collection of reports as to methods and devices used in all accessible institutions. For instance, it would be useful to know how many schools employ scientific phonetics in teaching a knowledge of pronunciation; whether scientific phonetics are

introduced at the very beginning of the first year; whether the standard phonetic alphabet is used; whether there is a daily phonetic drill, and, if so, of what nature it is, and how long it lasts at different times in the year, etc., etc. It would also be helpful to learn what devices are employed to encourage the student to use, in and out of class, the language that he is studying. As means to this end we might put the following questions: How much time daily is devoted to concert repetitions and to replies to questions? How is the period divided to enable each student to say something individually? How is the student trained to formulate and to answer questions? What means are employed to conquer timidity? etc., etc., etc.

Similar questions concerning the development of the students' ability to understand, to read, and to write a language, and inquiries concerning cultural benefits will be noticed in some detail in the questionnaire at the end of this article.

The following is a plan for collecting data along the lines indicated in the preceding argument. In or about May of each year a questionnaire would be sent to all institutions from which a reply could reasonably be expected. The replies should be received by the end of the school year. <sup>1</sup> They could be read, classified and prepared for publication by the beginning of the next school year.

The object of a questionnaire like the one proposed is purely and simply the collection of facts. It is not intended to include in the statistics any theory as to what should be done to improve pedagogical methods in any department of modern language teaching, nor even to draw any conclusion from the statistics, except in so far as these speak for themselves. Such a body of material may well give rise to theories; it is to be hoped that it will furnish the starting point for numerous schemes of improvement. But in itself it can only be the data of teaching.

A possible danger might arise if these statistics were considered an attempt at too much standardization. They should not be so considered, if it is understood that no motive lies behind them other than the discovery of the truth as to teaching conditions in modern languages. Theories based on the figures might lead either in the direction of standardization or away from it. In short, the aim of this paper is to propose, or at least to open

to discussion, the question of the advisability of establishing machinery for an annual<sup>2</sup> recording of the facts of modern language teaching in the United States.

Unfortunately, many questions to which we should like answers, cannot be answered satisfactorily in brief compass. Others can be answered only vaguely, in such a way that the answer is hedged about with conditions. In preparing an annual review of the situation, only such questions should be raised as will admit a fairly clear-cut answer in a few words. The more definite a reply is, the more easily it can be classified. Thus, it is easy to name the texts used in a given class during a given year, and figures based on this kind of information can be easily tabulated. It is much more difficult to classify answers to questions on the cultural value of a language.

The following is a tentative questionnaire.<sup>3</sup>

#### I. PRELIMINARY INFORMATION

1. How many students are in the class? (If one teacher has several sections of one class, the average number should be given.)
2. What is the proportion of male and female students?
3. What is the number of class periods per week?
4. What is the average age of the students?
5. Is the language in question required or an elective?
6. Is the method of supervised study used?
7. Have the students usually studied Latin or other foreign languages? What is the general character of linguistic preparation—good, mediocre, or poor?
8. What languages are taught in your institution and in what order?
9. Do you specialize in this subject or teach other subjects also?

<sup>2</sup> Possibly biennial or triennial, or perhaps some questions ought to be answered every year, and others at longer intervals.

<sup>3</sup> It is realized that some questions can be answered only by estimates or by expressions of opinion. It is also evident that some questions apply only to first year work, whereas others are applicable only to really advanced classes. The writer has had in mind for investigation a four year course in high schools and two years in colleges. Where there are several sections of one class in the same institution, several blanks would be sent with the idea that each teacher would fill one out. The questions, as here presented, must be corrected and improved before they are considered in final form.

10. Does the institution possess facilities in the way of maps? wall charts? lantern slides? library? national pictures? etc.

## II. SPEAKING

### (a) *Pronunciation*

1. Do you use phonetics (i.e., scientific description of sounds) without a phonetic alphabet?
2. Do you use a phonetic alphabet? If so, which one?
3. When do you begin the phonetic alphabet?
4. Do you have a periodical phonetic drill? If so, how often? How long does it last? What is its general nature?
5. What sounds give most trouble?
6. Is any method other than mere imitation used to teach pronunciation of phrases of sentences?
7. Do you use in class any specific book on pronunciation apart from the grammar?

### (b) *Practice in Speaking*

1. Do you use objects and pictures? If so, during what portion of the year?
2. How much time a week do you average for oral work?
3. Do you use chorus repetition?
4. How much time do you estimate that each student is speaking the foreign language, whether alone or in chorus, during the period?
5. Are the students, on the whole, excessively timid about speaking the foreign language?
6. Do you generally use the oral exercises suggested in the grammar or do you develop your own?
7. Which do you consider more important, fluency or correctness? Which is harder to develop?
8. Do you assign passages to be memorized? If so, name pieces most commonly assigned.
9. Do you begin work with a book in the possession of the student?
10. What opportunities are there for practice outside of class—clubs, dramatics, foreigners in institution or in city, etc.?

## III. UNDERSTANDING

1. Is English excluded from the class-room?
2. Is English used for grammatical explanations?

3. Is English ordinarily used for other purposes?
4. Does the student have the opportunity to hear anybody speak the language except one teacher and his fellow students, either in the class-room or outside?
5. On the whole do you aim to pronounce as in normal conversation, or more slowly and distinctly?
6. What are the most difficult things for the student to grasp by hearing—special sounds? elisions? vocabulary? idioms? pronouns? phrases? verbs? general rhythm of phrases and sentences, etc.?
7. Do you use dictation? If so, about how much?
8. Is a phonograph used?
9. Do students translate from hearing?

#### IV. READING

1. What texts (books, periodicals, newspapers) have you used this year?
2. How many pages have you read this year?
3. Do you translate? always? usually? often? rarely? etc.
4. Do you do sight translation? If so, about how much?
5. Do you assign outside reading? If so, about how much?
6. Are plays used just like other works, or is there any attempt to use them for dramatic purposes?
7. When do you begin reading? (for first-year classes only).
8. About how much do you assign in each recitation in the first half of the year? in the second half?
9. Do you ask questions in the foreign language on the reading?
10. What seem to be the chief stumbling blocks to intelligent reading?

#### V. GRAMMAR AND COMPOSITION

1. What grammar or composition books have you used this year?
2. How much of it did you take in the first semester? in the second semester?
3. How do you use the compositions from French to English? For translation? For grammar? For conversation?
4. Do you use all the compositions from English to French? Do you use some of them?
5. Do you require original compositions? i.e., do you use any scheme whereby the student composes his own sentences?

6. Do you use drill work provided in books? Do you make up your own?
7. Do you use notebooks? Are they corrected from board?
8. Is there oral drill on the composition?
9. What grammatical points seem hardest for students to understand?

## VI. CULTURE

1. What effort is made to explain the history and institutions of the foreign country?
2. Are there literary discussions?
3. Is the student brought into sympathy with the country or countries whose language he studies? How?
4. What are the chief drawbacks to the acquirement through language study of general cultivation: lack of preparation? narrow nationalism? race prejudice? lack of time? lack of interest?
5. Is there any introduction to general philology or history of language?
6. Are linguistic and literary comparisons used?
7. Is reading systematic in the direction of literary types?
8. Are any reasons presented for language study?
9. Are there collateral courses in the institution, such as history of the country whose language is studied? If so, do the language students often take them?

## VII. EXAMINATIONS

1. On what points do you examine students?
2. What percentage of importance is given to grammar? translation? pronunciation? understanding? compositions? etc.
3. What relative value is given to class standing and examinations?

*University of Illinois.*